

HUNZA BABIES

854 round him, he looked extremely comfortable and well-protected. Next, a piece of wide cloth was threaded by its hem on a rod fastened along the side of the cradle, and passed several times over his tummy and under the wooden cot, being finally lashed to the ridge pole. If the cradle had then been knocked over or rolled down hill baby could neither fall out nor get bumped. Finally a thick blanket was thrown over like a tent, and he was safe from dust or smoke or flies—or fresh air. Mother gave a few gentle rocks and he settled into sleep.

851 The use of the cradle in Hunza is said to be relatively recent,
352 and the pattern of it, wherever it was introduced from, includes the prescription that it shall be made from a special sort of hard wood that grows wild on certain mountain spots and is supposed to possess magical properties. The ridge-pole forms a convenient carrying handle, and wherever you see a group of women working and chatting together, spinning in the shade or on the roof, beating out new-washed wool on a sandy patch beside a stream, pounding kernels, washing clothes, or busy on the threshing floor, you will usually see a cradle or two beside them. Truby King might disapprove of so much infant seclusion; but the flat roof offers a drop of 12 or 14 feet on to boulders, and even the living-room a gentle roll into the open
855 hearth, so that Hunza is no place for crawlers. By the time
893 baby is ripe for toddling, he is old enough to be entrusted to
857 the next-older children, who take him pick-a-back or on their shoulders, scaling walls and leaping streams with him as sure-footed as young goats, and as fearless. They carry him to some flat spot and guard him with the most scrupulous care and proudly watch over his first steps.

● 163 Babies in Hunza are spaced at intervals of three and four
866 years, so no mother is worn out with child-bearing or embarrassed in her daily work by ex-babies clinging to her skirts and jealous of the infant in her arms. Banu, for instance, was four, sturdy and ripe for independence, before Faqér came to claim the family's attention. Soon after his arrival we used to see her stalking about, proudly taking her first walks alone, and obviously savouring the new freedom from older supervision. One day she had passed twice or three times up and

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down on the far side of our Dála. It had gently sloping banks ¹⁶³ ● where it passed our door, and was both narrow and shallow, ⁸⁶⁶ having been divided a mile or so away to give Aliábád the "Middle Channel" that ran 30 or 40 feet above our level and watered the fields between. She looked long at it and pondered. She wanted to come over, but had always before leaped the little stream on Naját's or Derwish's back. Presently she made her decision and her first jump and fell spread-eagled into 18 inches or so of water. She gave a cry, wholly of vexation, not at all of fright, and scrambled safely out. Someone ran up laughing, took off her little shift and spread it for her in the sun to dry. She played about cheerfully on a sunny patch of sand till it was ready, and later we saw her jumping triumphantly to and fro, again and yet again, as if she could never jump enough. By the time Faqér emerges from his cradle she will be leaping the Dála with him astride her back.

Our very first girl friend, Kaníza of No. 3, has a younger ⁸⁶⁵ sister, Gúlo, a sporting little imp, who had just cut her second teeth. One day she had a difference of opinion with her family, and we met her striding away from home. "Where are you off to?" "I'm annoyed," she said. "I'm going to mother's folk in Báltit," and off she set on a solitary four-mile mountain walk and a climb of hundreds of feet to her grandparents' home. No one tried to call her back or reason with her. She was wisely left to work off her waywardness her own way. She must have tramped home again the same day, for on the morrow we saw her happily busy with her own people again. After that our usual greeting to her was: "Hullo, Gúlo, off to Báltit?" "Not to-day!" she would say with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. Thus the Hunza youngsters learn independence.

The only drawback—from my point of view—about the sheltered life of the Hunza infants, was that when they were out for a walk in someone's arms, they were distinctly world-shy and were apt to set up a howl if I approached too near. The three-year olds were seldom frightened—though you must remember that a pale-faced woman with horrible blue eyes ("cat's eyes" they call them amongst themselves), and an [826]

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with a shaft of bright sunlight striking obliquely through the smoke-hole, and innumerable youngsters in continuous movement. Still, he got some records, if not exhibition photographs, of the event. 585

In many ways Hunza marriage customs are more enlightened than our own. The newly wedded pair are permitted the privacy of some barn or outhouse for their early days, but the two are not abandoned to their own inexperience to make or mar their future physical relations; no terrified bride is forcibly raped on her wedding night by the clumsy impetuosity of her mate, no diffident and chivalrous boy left agape in ignorance of acceptable advances. The bridegroom's mother stays with them, and teaches him to woo and win in such fashion that both may have the maximum joy of their new experience. In cases where the bride is over-fearful or over-young, the boy's mother will sleep between them to protect her till the couple are ripe for mating, and should the bride conceive an unconquerable aversion for her husband the marriage is tolerantly annulled by consent. Her own mother will reason with her and endeavour to persuade her, but the girl will not be coerced against her will. 586

When the instructional honeymoon is over the young people take their place with the other married pairs in the common living-room, where kindly darkness gives privacy at night to all. 591

As soon as a woman is aware that she has conceived, she quits her husband's side and joins the other women on their sleeping bench, while he rejoins the group of bachelors, and not until their child is weaned will the couple mate again. A husband who babbled of marital rights as overriding the rights of wife and child would be an outcast amongst his kin. If a father by impatience robs his child of the full period of its mother's nursing—usually three years for a boy and two for a girl—the pirate baby that ensues is stigmatized by a name more opprobrious than "bastard." This enforced continence appears to inflict no hardship on the husband; he is not asked to exercise it in a *solitude à deux* or the provocative proximity of a barbaric double bed. Moreover, he has known from babyhood that such a forbearance forms an integral part of the scheme of 842 843 813 853 842 163 ●

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842 married life; he has been married early and has no arrears of sex-starvation to make up, and he lives a healthy, active, outdoor life with no unwholesomely suggestive literature or cinema shows to stir his blood to rebellion. This admirable convention automatically spaces Hunza infants at decent intervals without artificial birth-control.

837 Unfaithfulness on either side is extremely rare, and I venture to assert without fear of contradiction that in Hunza morals are higher than in any other country in the world. There is no prostitute in the country, and no venereal disease. We may, I think, fairly ascribe this to high principle and a strongly developed tradition of fine practice, but we need not overlook the fact that circumstances conspire to reinforce principle. DL and I used sometimes to amuse ourselves speculating on the possible ways in which a pair of errant lovers, if such existed, could gratify their guilty passion, and we decided that the way of transgressors would be exceptionally hard.

No man or woman could be absent from the usual sleeping place without immediate comment, and by day each person's duties and destinations and occupations are common knowledge. The countryside lies sloping and open to view, and every corner and cranny of it, even the desolate rocky mountain sides where large boulders or ravines or semi-caves might seem to offer privacy, is subject to invasion at any moment by a herd-child with his goats. One tale was told us of an intriguing pair. The woman lover went to the edge of the river cliff, left some identifiable articles on the brink, and staged an accident. She then hid herself with the mother's connivance in the locked store-room of her lover's house. No search was made for the body, for these mountain rivers reveal no secrets, but it was, of course, not long before her presence in her lover's house was discovered. The unusual case came up before the Mir, whose sane judgment was that the guilty pair had better be divorced from their lawful partners and married to each other. Public opinion would have none of it, and while discussion was proceeding the disgraced woman drowned herself in earnest. I don't remember what the man's fate was, but general odium would certainly compel him to seek voluntary exile.

compliment them by mentioning among their qualities ⁸⁰⁵ the fact that they were precise and exacting. That statement is about as far-fetched as a statement can be.

In the cities of Asia and when dealing with government officials, one found them quite observant of time. An appointment for a certain hour was usually kept at that hour. However, in dealing with the people of ^[804] Hunza I found that time and distance were meaningless. All rivers were nullahs, all mountains were dorani. Haste and speed caused consternation. They did not understand the necessity or need for it. I stress again however, that in the official capacity this did not necessarily apply.

Birth control—More than one writer, and some who ⁸⁴² should have had more common sense, has referred to the extraordinary method of birth control as practiced by the people of Hunza. From my observations I would state clearly and to the point, that they don't know what birth control means and it is from my observations and conclusion definitely not practiced.

The average family in Hunza consists of 7 people ^[163] which means that they have 5 living children. Many have more, some have less. If you can call that birth control by any stretch of the imagination, well, that's your privilege.

Even the most primitive of people know that as long as the child is sucking at the mammary glands the ovum somehow doesn't come down the fallopian tubes . . . nature's own method of survival, as common sense will indicate.

I know—I know—I know that some or many obstetricians and general practitioners say that it doesn't mean a thing, but they are just trying to prove that science is greater than empiricism. Sure, I know that conception can take place under the circumstances